**Advent Vespers I,**

 **The First Sunday in Advent,**

27 November 2022.

 *Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“The Babe Born in Bethlehem is the Eternal Son of God Born to Save Men from Sin.”**

But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.

**Micah 5:2**.[[1]](#footnote-1)1

**Introduction**.

 The Prophet Micah speaks of a ruler in Israel who is both born and from eternity. How does that work? It works because the Babe and Ruler of Israel born in Bethlehem is the Eternal Son of God Incarnate to save men from their sins.

 This Ruler was born to shoulder the burdens of the people and save them. Unlike worldly kings, who get their power from the people, this King empowers the people.[[2]](#footnote-2)2 Christ shoulders the burdens of the people which are sin and its consequences. By Himself suffering the consequences of the sins of the people, of all men, Christ delivers His people from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

 This King Rules Graciously over His people through the Gospel. Through the forgiveness of sins, He restores them to God and to life everlasting.

 The Babe Born in Bethlehem is the Eternal Son of God born to save men from sin unto life everlasting.

**I. Christ the Savior is the Eternal Son of God Born in Time of the Virgin St. Mary to Save Men from their Sins.**

**A. Micah 5:2 ff is a Messianic prophecy.**

 During this season of Advent we will be mediating on **Micah 5:2-4**. **Micah 5:2-4** is a Messianic prophecy foretelling the coming of Christ our Savior in His First Advent to build His Church throughout the world.

 Micah was working around 725 BC[[3]](#footnote-3)3 prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.[[4]](#footnote-4)4 Micah preached repentance to both the Northern Kingdom and the Kingdom of Judah.

 Like all prophets the Prophet Micah addressed the concerns of the time but did not neglect to direct people to the coming of the Messiah to inspire and encourage them. Luther writes of this pattern of the prophets to address the issues of their time followed by turning people to the coming of Christ in apocalyptic [revelatory] sweep[[5]](#footnote-5)5 of human history. The prophets use the apocalyptic sweep in order to inspire and to encourage the people of Judah that they were working for a greater purpose than just earthly concerns but for eternal and glorious purposes that would benefit Israel and the Gentiles. In the following passage Luther describes this pattern in the prophet Joel:

28. *And it will come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit*. Here the real prophecy begins, which we must clearly separate from what has gone before. Peter has treated this in Acts 2:17 ff. First we must speak about the transition of the prophet. If readers of the prophets do not understand it, it offends them very much. You see, it is the custom of the prophets that when have declared that prophecy for which they had been sent, they put aside what has taken place after the revelation of their prophecy and immediately go on to prophecy about Christ. Although all the prophets were sent to announce some temporal punishment, yet they would always connect something about Christ to it too. Here the prophet Joel did the same thing. He quickly passes across from the Jews to the future people of Christ, and he meanwhile skips everything that took place after the declaration of the prophecy here. Thus when he says “afterwards,” we must not apply this to the destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. Rather, it is the custom of the prophets at this point to omit certain events that have taken place and to go on to announce other things that are going to happen much later. After all, that revelation of the Holy Spirit about which the prophet speaks here occurred long afterwards.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

 **Micah 5:2-4** is a Messianic prophecy, reminding the Northern Kingdom and Judah and all men about the Person and Work of Christ to save men from their sins. Luther writes:

Micah is one of he fine prophets who rebukes the people severely for their idolatry and constantly refers to the coming Christ and to his kingdom. In one respect he is unique among the prophets, in that he points with certainty to Bethlehem, naming it as the town where Christ was to be born [5:2]. For this reason he was famous under the Old Covenant, as Matthew certainly shows in chapter 2[:3-6]. In short he denounces, he prophesies, he preaches, etc. Ultimately, however, his meaning is that even though Israel and Judah have to go to pieces, Christ will yet come and make all things good.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

**B. In Bethlehem is born the Eternal Son of God Incarnate.**

Micah uses interesting expressions in prophesying about the Messiah:

But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Here is a ruler who is born in Bethlehem but has been going forth from everlasting. What does this mean? It means the eternal Son of God is Incarnate in His birth of the Virgin St. Mary.

 Jesus’ goings forth are from everlasting because He is the eternally-begotten Son of the Father. King David writes of Christ’s eternal generation from the Father:

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

Luther writes of this passage:

But is it enough to know this about that King? By no means. He is also the Son of God, begotten from eternity. This could not be discerned with the eyes, and so the King Himself teaches it. It is a matter of faith. In order not to distort the text, one must weigh the words: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” God is outside time, a spiritual being. Therefore, He cannot beget something temporal, something physical, but brings forth something like Himself, that is, eternal and spiritual. Since He speaks these words to that person set on Zion, however, that He should be king in a physical and visible place, what follows from this? Is it not this, that this man born in time of the Virgin Mary existed before He was conceived ind Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit, indeed from eternity? For “today” in the case of God, as we shall point out later, has no beginning and has no end. Thus the present text joins together the divine and the human so that they are one, so that you may correctly say: This man is God.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

While this Ruler is eternal, He is also born. The Son of God is born of the Virgin St. Mary. Consequently, Scripture calls the Virgin St. Mary the “Mother of God”. The Virgin St. Mary is the Mother of God not because she brought God into being but rather because the Eternal Son of God was born of her when He became Incarnate. St. Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist, confessed this Blessed Truth when she saw the Virgin St. Mary drawing near to her home:

And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

 The Prophet Micah prophesied that the eternal Son of God would be born of a woman, the Virgin St. Mary, eight centuries before His birth.

**C. Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God Able and Willing to Save from Sin.**

The Incarnate Son of God would be, as the Prophet Micah notes, a “ruler in Israel.” A ruler tends to the needs of his people. Luther writes:

A king serves God when he is at pains to look after and govern his people.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

Jesus is the King who tended to the people’s needs by Atoning for their sins and saving them. In the first place Jesus was born in order to afford all men a pure birth because all men are born in sin because of the fall of Adam, the father of all men, into sin. Luther writes:

Christ is born for you and ... his birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for our sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake ... . Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful, damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5] ... . There is simply no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. ... Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner ... . In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he present us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

 From this Pure Birth emerges a Holy Life lived for all men. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of Christ living a holy life for all men in order to deliver them from their unholy life of sin from the moment of conception:

This teaching of Scripture [of Christ’s *Active Obedience*] is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ’s vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: ‘He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced.’”1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

 In addition to fulfilling all men’s holy obligations to God, Christ also suffered the downside of men not fulfilling their obligations to God.. The Prophet Isaiah writes:

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that tho mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

 A “light thing” to bear the eternal burdens of Israel for their sins? Who talks like this? God does. God does when He contrast the burdens of men with Infinite Power of the Son of God to bear those burdens. Compared to the Infinite Power of the Son of God the infinite and eternal burdens of men are dwarfed to a light thing. *This Blessed Truth gives us great confidence that we are reconciled to God because Jesus can indeed bear our burdens and fulfill our obligations to God*. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

Miserable man had angered the infinite God with his sin; therefore, he fell into an infinite evil. Such an infinite evil could be paid for and removed in no in no other way than with the infinite Good. Now then, apart from God nothing is infinitely good. That’s why God became man, so that man be enabled to pay on the strength of the infinite divinity, so that this divine payment avail for the benefit of man on account of the personal union, and so that divine righteousness adequately accomplish this. This is the wondrous accomplishment of divine righteousness and mercy.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7

 The Babe born in Bethlehem is the Eternal Son of God born to save men from their sins and give life eternal.

**II. Jesus Reigns and Rules through the Gospel to Save His People from their Sins and Give Life Eternal.**

 **A. Jesus Rules through the Gospel**.

 The prophet Micah, as we’ve noted already, writes that Jesus is a Ruler. But how does He rule? Obviously, Jesus does not rule as do other kings because He comes not to punish sinners but rather to save sinners. Consequently, *Jesus Rules through the Gospel, i.e., He Rules through the Absolution of sin*. To rule means to have the last word.1[[18]](#footnote-18)8 The Last Word in the Church is the Gospel, the Absolution of sin.1[[19]](#footnote-19)9 The Apostle St. John writes:

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.2[[20]](#footnote-20)0

 The Last Word in Jesus’ Kingdom sinners is not punishment but Absolution of all sin. The Scepter of Christ is the Gracious Rule of the Gospel.2[[21]](#footnote-21)1 Luther writes:

The scepter is to be nothing but the Word or preaching which proclaims how we shall be saved; that is to say, how to be redeemed from sin and death and brought to eternal righteousness and life by this Lord, something which neither secular government nor the Law of Moses can do for us.2[[22]](#footnote-22)2

**B. Jesus’ Gracious Rule of Absolution save and gives life everlasting.**

And the where there is Forgiveness of sin there is Salvation, as Luther has already noted. The Apostle St. Matthew writes of Jesus:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.2[[23]](#footnote-23)3

 Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also not only Salvation but life everlasting. So we learned in Catechism regarding the benefit of the Gospel:

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? That is shown us b these words, “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins”; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.2[[24]](#footnote-24)4

**Conclusion**.

 The Prophet Micah prophesied over 700 years before the Birth of Christ His Person and Work. Jesus is the Eternal Son of God Incarnate to save men from their sins by His bearing the burden of their sins on the Cross for them.

 Through the Gospel He Graciously Rules His Church with Absolution and faith2[[25]](#footnote-25)5 in order to save man and give life everlasting. ***Amen.***

1. **1Micah 5:1-5a. “Micah. 725 BC. [5]:1. But thou (adversative waw. Yes all the calamities are going to befall Judah in the days to come) Ephratah (obviously there was other Bethlehems) so little to be among the clans of Judah from thee to Me there will come forth One to be Ruler in Israel (a ruler would be born there; this does necessitate the end of the Davidic dynasty because Jerusalem had been strongly attached to the family of David. Micah spoke of the end of the Davidic Dynasty in previous chapter ). But His days are from eternity (eternity stressed by using both *qedem* {aforetime} and *’alam* {antiquity}; speaking of His eternal generation [Psalm 2:7]).**

 **[5]:2. Therefore, the Lord will give them [the Judahites] up until a time of the one to bear has born, then the remainder of His brethren will return to the people of Israel (picks up on Isaiah 7; people already referring to; returning to the sons of Israel are the Gentiles; come together to form the NT [New Testament] Church).**

 **[5]:3. He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord (exaltation of Christ according to His human nature). In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God (His God can only mean according tot he assumed human nature). And they will dwell because He will be great until the ends of the earth.**

 **[5]:4 And this One shall be peace (He is the very basis fo peace with God; see Luke 2).”**

 **The Rev. Dr. Douglas Judisch from notes by Willis Jenson from his *Messianic Prophecies* class at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, c. 1988, amplification in brackets and translation from the Hebrew in braces added.”**

 **“Micah. 8th Century. 725 BC.**

 **Historical Circumstance: during the time of Ahaz. Purpose: to bring the people of Judah back to repentance, also Samaria.**

 **Christology: 5:2 the birthplace of the Messiah (two-natures predicted).”** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2“The powers of the people lie in their King [Christ] rather than the reverse, which is true in the case of worldly kings.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 20, p. 94, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3Douglas Judisch, *The Pre-Exilic Books Prophecy*, third edition, Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne: 1999, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4The Northern Kingdom consisted of the tribes that revolted against the rule of Solomon’s son and successor, Rehoboam, under the leadership of Jeroboam (**I Kings 11:26-40**). The ten tribes that formed the Northern Kingdom were: Reuben, Dan, Asher, Issachar, Zebulon, Naphtali, Simeon, Mannasseh, Ephraim, and Gad.

 The Northern Kingdom came to an end at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC. “722 ... Samaria [capitol of the Northern Kingdom] fell to Shalmaneser [V] [king of Assyria]. Shalmaneser incorporated the remaining land of Israel as a province and Israel ceased to be a national entity. ... Many of the inhabitants were deported to various countries of the Assyrian empire. ... Many new people were imported from various countries of the Empire. From this mixture came the Samaritans and the ten tribes ended as a people.” The Rev. Dr. Douglas Judisch, *Chronology of the Old Testament*, manuscript, c. 1989, “The Chronology of the Northern Kingdom (The Royal Houses of Israel -- 931-722 BC) IX. 722 1-4, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5The expression “apocalyptic sweep” describing this prophetic pattern originated with the Rev. Dr. Douglas Judisch, professor of Old Testament exegesis at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, c. 1989.

 “The purpose of Daniel in writing the book known by his name was to encourage the people of God in the midst of all possible opposition. The theme, correspondingly, of the Book of Daniel may be stated thus: The God of Israel is in complete control of history. The Book of Daniel is the archetypal exemplar in the Old Testament -- and, indeed, in the Bible as a whole -- of the genre of literature known as apocalyptic. Even the Book of Revelation assumes a prior familiarity with Daniel and builds on the foundation laid there. The apocalyptic genre may be defined as a variety of prophecy will reveals to human view the whole future course of human history on the basis of the plan of God.” The Rev. Dr. Douglas Judisch, *Exegetical Notes on Daniel 12:1-3*, underscore added, [**http://www.projectwittenberg.org/etext/judisch/dan12.htm**](http://www.projectwittenberg.org/etext/judisch/dan12.htm) . [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 18, pp. 105, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35, p. 324. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Micah 5:2**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9**Psalm 2:7**. “To Christ is attributed: (1) *Eternity*. He was born of the Father from eternity (Ps. 2:7, Mic. 5:2). He existed before the creation of the world (Prov. 8:22). In the beginning He already was (John 1:1, 1 John 1:1). “He had glory with the Father created (John 17:[5]).” John Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces* ... *On the Person and Office of Christ*, tr. Richard J. Dinda, edited with annotations by Benjamin T. G. Mayes, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, no date, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 12, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**St. Luke 1:43**. “On account of this personal union and communion of the natures, Mary, the most blessed Virgin, bore not a mere man, but, as the angel [Gabriel] testifies, such a man as is truly the Son of the most high God, who showed His divine majesty even in His mother’s womb, inasmuch as He was born of a virgin, with her virginity inviolate. Therefore she is truly the mother of God, and nevertheless remained a virgin.” **The Formula of Concord: Thorough (Solid) Declaration**, **Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ**.24, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 1023. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 3, p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13Marin Luther*, Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14**Galatians 4:4-5**. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16**Isaiah 49:6**. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons*, tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. the Rev. David O. Berger, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 37, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18The final say or the decision or the resolving of a matter is what is meant by headship or governing. "To govern is to choose." President John F. Kennedy, quoted in "A Lamm Candidacy: Welcome but Improbable", "Politics and People", Albert R. Hunt, The Wall Street Journal, 11 July 1996, p. (A)17. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19“It is therefore a part of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel that the Gospel be recognized as the ‘higher Word’, which is to be God's final Word for the terrified sinner. Luther adds: ‘For as the lesser Word it [the Law] should and must give way and place to the Gospel. Both are God's Word, the Law and the Gospel, but the two are not equal. One is lower, the other higher; one is lesser the other greater.’” "Law and Gospel (De Discrimine Legis Et Evangelii): 3. Law and Gospel as Opposites", The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 20**St. John 20:21-23**. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 21“But if the Word is removed, then God Himself and true worship are also removed. In works there are always endless defects, which even the performers themselves always find in them, and among the ungodly satisfaction is never to be made nor any forgiveness of sins. But faith in Christ makes life happy, even though we may fall at times. ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ He says (Matt. 9:2). We believe in the forgiveness of sins.” Martin Luther, Vol. 16, pp. 152, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 22Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 13, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. 23**St. Matthew 1:21**. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. 24*The Small Catechism*, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. 25The Gospel is Absolution and faith. “Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. {German text: The word of absolution speaks peace to me and is the Gospel itself.} Thus we also comprise absolution when we speak of faith, because *faith cometh by hearing*, as Paul says Rom. 10, 17. For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution [*i.e.*, the promise of divine grace] is heard, the conscience is encouraged and receives consolation.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, **Article XII. (V.)**.39, *Triglotta*, pp. 261, translation from the German in braces is mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)